

# A Transient, A Teenager, and a Cup of Tea

*What Happens When Two JFA Trainers “Stop Working”?*

JOANNA WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE



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She looked straight at Tim and said, **“I hate you.”**

Forty-five minutes later the same girl looked at both of us and said, **“You are the coolest people I’ve ever met.”**

What happened here?

A few months ago, my colleague Tim and I approached Mead’s Corner, a coffee shop in downtown Wichita, Kansas. As we reached the entrance, I said hello to Nick, the homeless man that sat outside of Mead’s holding a cardboard sign. Nick looked up at us with hope-filled eyes, and Tim said to him, “I’d be happy to buy you some food...”

“I’m hungry,” Nick said.

A few minutes later, having purchased a sandwich and tea for our new friend, Tim, Nick, and I all stood by the counter together, feeling somewhat awkward. Finally, I broke the silence. “Would you like to join us at our table, Nick?” He smiled and followed Tim and me to the crowded back room. The three of us sat down. I sipped my tea quietly. Nick began to eat his sandwich. Our little table was wrapped in silence for what seemed to be a long time. Just before it felt like a *very* long time, Tim asked, “Nick, do you believe in God?”

That question initiated a brief discussion with Nick about his self-proclaimed worship of Satan and his anger at nearly everyone. It became clear that he was inebriated as he continued to describe his adventures and woes with animated gestures and an uncomfortably loud volume. Tim and I managed to express a few things about the love of God and a little of why we look to Jesus as our guide.

In the midst of this confusing interaction, a 15-year-old girl with inquisitive eyes and bright red lipstick popped into our conversation, seemingly out of nowhere. She took the empty chair at our little square table and said excitedly, “But come on ... don’t you know that the Bible has been translated repeatedly, for centuries? How can you possibly trust the book you hold in your hands today?” I smiled, a bit taken aback.

“That is a great question,” Tim said. “What is your name?”

“Kelsey,” she replied. “I have lots of questions!”

Soon after this, Nick told us he had to go. That left Kelsey, Tim, and me (along with Nick’s empty liquor bottle) at our little table in the back room.

**“People don’t do this – just sit and talk and actually listen.”**

Kelsey certainly wasn’t lying when she told us she had lots of questions. She had searched for reasons to believe in Jesus, and it seemed that no one had yet been able to communicate any to her. We did our best to answer her questions, but in the middle of each of our responses, she’d interject yet another question. At one point, she raised the issue of politics:

“I mean, the way I see it, the church and the state should be separate, right? Like, with abortion – that’s basically a religious issue. Why can’t the church just keep its business out of politics?”

Tim and I glanced at each other. We knew that Kelsey had no idea what we do for work. I was about to respond to her question, but then she quickly raised another question: “And what about gay marriage? That’s a



JUSTICE FOR ALL TRAINS THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

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religious issue, too. I mean what do you think about that?” She looked straight at Tim.

If I know someone isn't going to like my answer to her question, I generally try to frontload my response with caveats. But Tim has a more simple and straightforward approach: “Well, I don't agree with it,” he said.

Before he had any time to explain, Kelsey exclaimed, “I hate you!”



The Justice For All Exhibit Brochure is helpful to me in conversations, both at JFA outreach events like this one at the University of Central Oklahoma, and in my everyday life with people like Kelsey.

After a short silence, Tim replied carefully, “Well, Kelsey, I don't hate you.”

“I guess I shouldn't have said that I *hate* you,” she said. I just, you know, get frustrated... but you guys are nice. Wait – what do you do anyway?”

Tim and I looked at each other, and again, Tim spoke up. “We actually train pro-life people to dialogue about the issue of abortion.”

“Ohhh,” Kelsey said, with a look of regret at having ever started talking to us in the first place.

After that, Kelsey raised a number of reasons why she was pro-choice: “I don't like abortion, but it's a woman's choice, right? My friend got pregnant and kept the baby, and that was good for her, but my other friend had an abortion. I even had a pregnancy

scare myself, and if I'd been pregnant I don't know what I would've done. I don't know, I just think it should be the woman's choice.”

We talked for at least another forty-five minutes about her views and her friends' circumstances. At the end of the conversation, I asked if I could show her the Justice For All Exhibit Brochure, which includes pictures of fetal development as well as accurate images of what abortion does to unborn humans. She agreed to take a look.

As I opened the brochure to the fetal development photos on the first two pages, she became very interested. “Whoa! I've never seen what a fetus looks like before! ... Second trimester abortion is definitely not okay. What? Brainwaves beginning at six weeks? ... Oh wow! A heartbeat at three weeks!”

Finally, with a dejected tone she exclaimed, **“I couldn't ever get an abortion now!”**

We talked with Kelsey for a little while longer, and before we left I told her I'd be more than happy to talk with her again. “I can't imagine something I'd rather do than try to help answer your questions.” She looked at me with an unbelieving stare. “I'm serious,” I said. And then she said something I will never forget:

*You two are the coolest people I've ever met. People don't do this – just sit and talk and actually listen. You guys are normal and nice. I didn't expect pro-life Christians to be like that. The only reason I even gave you a chance when I came up to you at first was because you were talking to a homeless man. If you hadn't shown compassion in that way, I would've assumed that you were like everyone else.*

I walked out of Mead's that night with a huge smile on my face. Kelsey needed to see Christ's love and reasonableness lived out in real people. She'd never seen that before, and we were able to help. To her, what we did in that conversation was radical. But that kind of interaction should be normal for us as Christians. We should be making it a *common occurrence* for the Kelseys of this world to meet rational, compassionate Christians.

So, what's my challenge for you this month? Take one step out of your comfort zone. That may mean inviting the man off of the street to join you for a bite to eat. That may mean answering a young girl's questions about God. Or perhaps, it may simply mean taking the time to listen to a friend share about his beliefs.

What will you do to reach the Kelseys and Nicks in your town? There are literally thousands of them out there. **Ready? Go.**

*Joanna*

P.S. Kelsey and I did meet for coffee since this conversation, and I look forward to future interactions.